

16 December 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Some International Implications of Recent Developments
in Laos

1. If Phoumi fails to take and hold Vientiane, the chances are at least even that his forces will collapse as a coherent military organization and, unless there is outside intervention, the country will soon be dominated by the pro-Communist elements. If the Phoumi forces win the current battle for Vientiane, we believe this will mark only the beginning of a new phase in the protracted struggle for Laos.

2. The Boun Oum-Phoumi government will require extensive outside military and financial aid merely to survive. Even with such aid, large parts of the countryside will probably remain outside the control of the government; the government might also lose a number of key towns such as, for example, Xieng Khouang, Phong Saly, and even Luang Prabang.

3. If the Phoumi forces secure Vientiane, a Communist-dominated government will probably be set up at Nam Houa. The Communists will

25X1

try to give this government a national front flavor. Their choice to head it would almost certainly be Souvanna Phouma, in the unlikely event they could persuade him to accept it. The Bloc countries would promptly recognize and support a Sam Neua government.

4. We believe that Peiping and Hanoi have determined to provide whatever aid is required to prevent the establishment of an effective non-Communist regime in Laos. However, the amount of aid required for this purpose almost certainly would not be great, assuming no direct US military intervention. Accordingly, the Communists may believe it necessary only to continue and somewhat increase their current scale of assistance, channeling it through Sam Neua. Another element in this policy would probably be additional warnings and threats designed to increase tension, promote fear of war and arouse pressures on the US to withdraw its support from Phoumi. And the Communists probably consider that they would have a strong case in the UN, if the case should be brought to that body.

5. On the other hand, the indications of the past several days strongly suggest that Hanoi and Peiping, almost certainly

with the backing of Moscow, have determined on much more direct and substantial intervention in Laos, at an early date. Such intervention would include greatly increased airlift, a much larger number of technicians, and "volunteers".

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

BRITOMAN KENT
Chairman